

officer(s) in hearings required by statute, or member(s) of the staff in proceedings not required by statute.

Subpart U—[Removed]

7. In part 201, Subpart U—Charges for Orders, Notices, Rulings, Decisions, is removed.

Dated: February 18, 1998.

By Order of the Maritime Administration.

Joel C. Richard,

Secretary, Maritime Administration.

[FR Doc. 98-4505 Filed 2-23-98; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 4910-81-P

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Office of Procurement and Property Management

48 CFR Chapter 4

Use of Direct Final Rulemaking

AGENCY: Office of Procurement and Property Management, USDA.

ACTION: Policy Statement.

SUMMARY: The Office of Procurement and Property Management (OPPM) publishes rules governing USDA acquisition in 48 CFR chapter 4. OPPM also has proposed adding 7 CFR chapter XXXII to publish rules governing personal property management (63 FR 3481-3483, January 23, 1998). OPPM is implementing a new rulemaking procedure to expedite making noncontroversial changes to its regulations. Rules that the agency judges to be non-controversial and unlikely to result in adverse comments will be published as "direct final" rules. ("Adverse comments" are comments that suggest that a rule should not be adopted or suggest that a change should be made to the rule.) Each direct final rule will advise the public that no adverse comments are anticipated, and that unless written adverse comments or written notice of intent to submit adverse comments are received within 30 days, the revision made by the rule will be effective 60 days from the date the direct final rule is published in the **Federal Register**. This new policy should expedite the promulgation of routine or otherwise noncontroversial rules by reducing the time that would be required to develop, review, clear, and publish separate proposed and final rules.

EFFECTIVE DATE: February 24, 1998.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Joseph J. Daragan, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Office of Procurement and Property Management, Procurement

Policy Division, STOP 9303, 1400 Independence Avenue SW, Washington, DC 20250-9303, telephone (202) 720-5729.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: OPPM is committed to improving the efficiency of its regulatory process. In pursuit of this goal, we plan to employ the rulemaking procedure known as "direct final rulemaking" to promulgate some of OPPM's rules.

OPPM Regulations

OPPM promulgates USDA-wide policies, standards, techniques and procedures pertaining to procurement (acquisition), property management, disaster management, and coordination of emergency programs. To accomplish this function, OPPM may publish rules governing USDA acquisition in 48 CFR chapter 4. In a notice of proposed rulemaking (63 FR 3481-3483, January 23, 1998) OPPM proposed to publish rules governing personal property management by adding 7 CFR chapter XXXII.

The Direct Final Rule Process

Rules that OPPM judges to be noncontroversial and unlikely to result in adverse comments will be published as direct final rules. Each direct final rule will advise the public that no adverse comments are anticipated, and that unless written adverse comments or written notice of intent to submit adverse comments are received within 30 days, the revision made by the direct final rule will be effective 60 days from the date the direct final rule is published in the **Federal Register**.

"Adverse comments" are comments that suggest that the rule should not be adopted, or that suggest that a change should be made to the rule. A comment expressing support for the rule as published will not be considered adverse. Further, a comment suggesting that requirements in the rule should, or should not, be employed by OPPM in other programs or situations outside the scope of the direct final rule will not be considered adverse.

In accordance with the rulemaking provisions of the Administrative Procedure Act (5 U.S.C. 553), the direct final rulemaking procedure gives the public general notice of OPPM's intent to adopt a rule, and gives interested persons an opportunity to participate in the rulemaking through submission of comments. The major feature of direct final rulemaking is that if OPPM receives no written adverse comments and no written notice of intent to submit adverse comments within 30 days of the publication of the direct final rule, the rule will become effective without the

need to publish a separate final rule. However, OPPM will publish a notice in the **Federal Register** stating that no adverse comments were received regarding the direct final rule, and confirming that the direct final rule is effective on the date stated in the direct final rule.

If OPPM receives written adverse comments or written notice of intent to submit adverse comments within 30 days of the publication of a direct final rule, a notice of withdrawal of the direct final rule will be published in the **Federal Register**. If OPPM intends to proceed with the rulemaking, the direct final rule will be republished as a proposed rule and we will proceed with the normal notice-and-comment rulemaking procedures.

Determining When to Use Direct Final Rulemaking

Not all OPPM rules are good candidates for direct final rulemaking. OPPM intends to use the direct final rulemaking procedure only for rules that we consider to be non-controversial and unlikely to generate adverse comments. The decision to use direct final rulemaking for a rule will be based on OPPM's experience with similar rules.

Electronic Access Address

You may request additional information by sending electronic mail (E-mail) to JDARAGAN@USDA.GOV, or via fax at (202) 720-8972.

Done in Washington, D.C., this 7th day of January, 1998.

W.R. Ashworth,

Director, Office of Procurement and Property Management.

[FR Doc. 98-919 Filed 2-23-98; 8:45 am]

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 622

[Docket No. 970930235-8028-02; I.D. 021798E]

Fisheries of the Caribbean, Gulf of Mexico, and South Atlantic; Coastal Migratory Pelagic Resources of the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic; Fishery Openings

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Opening of Fisheries.